

## OUR VIEW

# Government accountability is in our hands

Last week, Oregon lawmakers made a good move toward greater transparency in government when they passed two bills connected to higher education.

House Bill 2542, which requires public universities and colleges to prominently display the fees they charge students, and House Bill 2919, which stipulates higher education facilities clearly display the costs of course materials when students register for class, secured passage.

On the face of it both bills may not seem altogether earth shattering, but they are important when placed in the context of transparency in government.

Transparency in government is a crucial pillar of a democracy. Sadly, over the past few decades that notion — and goal — of transparency has gradually been eroded.

That is not good for our form of government. When government agencies that are funded through public dollars step away from transparency, everyone loses. Yet, it occurs more often than the average public probably knows.

When government disregards transparency — or worse, acts like it is being transparent when it is not — it means it is no longer accountable to the people.

Millions in public funds are funneled into various state agencies every year in Oregon. That money is not the government's, it's yours. That means the people who work in government are accountable to you, the voter.

Oregon is lucky in a sense because of its public records laws, which provide a gateway into government when it refuses to hold itself accountable to the people. The public records laws are robust — to a point — but are constantly under siege by those who wish to restrict oversight.

Independent organizations, such as newspapers, are also an important tool to hold government accountable. Often, newspapers use public records laws to dig out information government agencies and officials do not want the public to see.

In a democracy, there should not be any type of restrictions — barring top secret military projects or personal health records — that hamper a voter's access to information.

While newspapers and news organizations fill a crucial role in ensuring greater transparency, in the end the voter must play a key role as well.

That means paying attention to what is going on in places such as the Oregon Legislature and asking good, thoughtful questions of lawmakers.

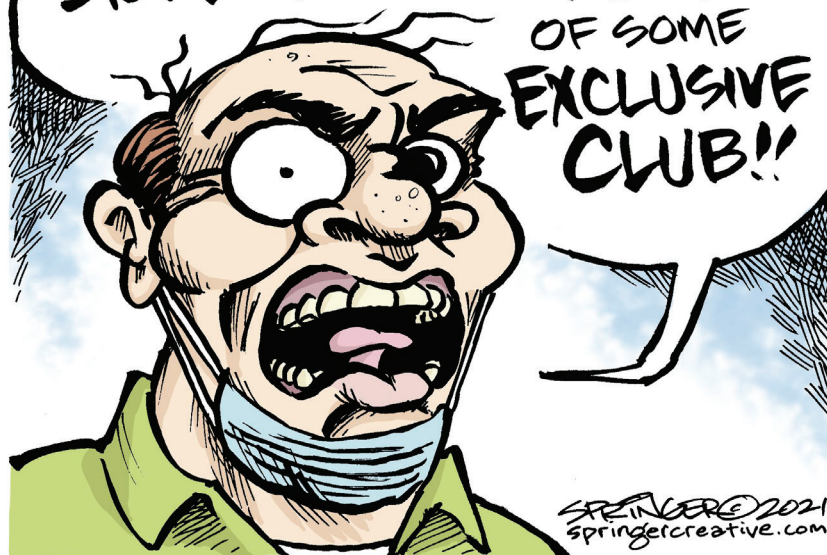
There never has been anything wrong about asking questions in democracy.

Government tends to block access to information, and sometimes appointed or elected officials will decide they know better than the voter about what information should be released.

They do not.

## OREGON REQUIRES MASKS INDOORS OR PROOF OF VACCINATION...

IT'S OUTRAGEOUS THAT I SHOULD HAVE TO SHOW A CARD BEFORE ENTERING A STORE-- LIKE I'M A MEMBER OF SOME EXCLUSIVE CLUB!!



COSTCO CARD, SIR?  
OH, YEAH-- HERE.  
THANKS.



# Inspiring our everyday lives



REGINA BRAKER  
ANOTHER MILE

On a rainy day in spring two years ago my friend from Alaska and I stood outside the high school talking. It was one of our first extensive conversations after getting to know one another only through small talk social gatherings and the brief chats that happened during choir rehearsal breaks. And because we had both walked to this rehearsal to sing with the high school choral students, we finished talking through whatever fascinated us before going our individual ways home.

Singing together has been a special joy that many of us have missed since our last joint efforts in musical theater, community and church choirs. Recently we joined with others at a local park to say farewell to our choir director and sing a few songs together. It felt like the months in between just melted away, as we heard one another's voices both in song and telling anecdotes. And my friend shared a bit about her best adventure of the last year, traveling to Portugal and singing at her son's wedding.

For many in that group and other singers, our fellow chorister has been a lifeline through her blog, sharing past travel adventures and stories of other interesting figures in her life, bringing a sense

of a wide-open world during the months languishing in lockdown. Her writing and photos brighten everyday reality, and bring thoughtful perspective to challenging realities. And when I read something shared in an email, I hear her laughter, remembered from a party or that day in the rain.

Recently a poem offered during poetry month in April suggested that the past year of pandemic had taken her to a thoughtful place. Some lines spoke to me: the things that kill the body / and kill the soul / have always been with us / they won't go away / what matters is / the chaff from grain / we cull / within.

Her wisdom comes from a wide range of sources: the music and literature she studied in college, her children's professions as musicians, a lifetime of journeys and exploring history and the people she has met along the way. One journey in particular was etched by the beauty of her surroundings, perhaps because she was traveling alone and took it all in with no other distractions.

It was in the south of France, her destination a village she had heard of and wanted to visit, but the train journey only took her as far as its neighboring town, beyond which there was no further public transport. She would have to walk, and did so, moving from the train station in the center of town toward vineyards and country cottages, her path following the town's river upstream toward its source near the village situated in a closed valley, its craggy hills and gushing turquoise

river stunning her with their beauty.

Upon arriving, she noticed the sign with the youth hostel symbol, a beautiful cottage filled with guests speaking German. They included her by summarizing in English their heated political discussion about changes in post-Cold War Europe. In the days that followed her arrival there, she joined two of her new acquaintances in bike rides around the region. Having walked into this beautiful place alone, she left it on foot enriched by new friendships.

When my friend visited again 30 years later, she asked, "After years of traveling and broadening my perspective beyond Alaska, would it still be the most beautiful place in the world?" Her answer was yes. She encourages others with these words: "May your feet take you to inspiring places and may your hands create something beautiful and help others!"

As I've followed my singing friend's travel writing, without possibility for extensive journeys beyond our shores even now, I've been taking her motto seriously, to look for new inspiration where my feet take me, to be open to new experiences and friendships right here where we are, to make the most of getting to know new places close to home. And I know that I will find beauty, and that there are always others around us we can help.

*Regina Braker, a retired educator with journeys through many places and experiences, enjoys getting to know people along the way.*

# Time for dialogue on dam removal issues



FRED ZIARI  
OTHER VIEWS

Northeastern Oregon is home to some of the most rich and fertile farmland in the state, producing potatoes, onion, carrots, peas and numerous other variety of crops for consumption here at home and for export around the globe. This region also leads the world in irrigation technologies and water sustainability.

The four lower Snake River dams play a vital role in sustaining this corner of the state, and our regional stakeholders have a long history of working together to preserve and enhance local salmon populations. That's why I was disappointed to learn that after joining the governors of Washington, Idaho and Montana in a collaborative effort to rebuild Columbia Basin salmon, Gov. Kate Brown filed a lawsuit over the federal government's management of the four lower Snake River dams.

I've been involved in the fish versus dams debate for nearly three decades, and lawsuits have gotten us nowhere. The only way forward is through working together toward a collaborative long-term solution. I hope Brown will set aside her lawsuit and work to make the four-state process a success.

The agriculture sector relies on the

four lower Snake River dams for hydropower, transportation and irrigation. The dams are a significant part of the federal hydropower system, which provides as much as 95% of the clean, reliable and affordable power essential to families, farmers, ranchers and businesses in rural Oregon. According to a recent three-year study of Snake River dams completed by the federal government, removal could result in an energy price hike in rural Oregon of up to 50%, which adds up to several hundred dollars per year for each rural family.

Farm operations and related agriculture industries and manufacturing are the backbone of our Umatilla and Morrow counties' economy, employing nearly 40% of local residents and producing crops and products that are barged down the Columbia River for export to world markets.

However, the federal study determined that removing the dams would make the Snake River unnavigable for barge traffic, resulting in higher production costs for farmers who would have to transition to rail or truck transport. Under this scenario, freight transportation by rail could increase by as much as 86% — a level that is too high for existing rail capacity.

The transition from barge to surface transportation also would result in more traffic congestion and the need for road and rail infrastructure improvements. Truck and rail transportation create higher emissions per ton than barges, which would result in a net increase in

CO2 emissions of approximately 17% — taking us in the wrong direction as the state is working to meet its clean energy goals.

With an average annual rainfall of less than 8 inches per year, our region is also dependent on the river for local water supply. Removal of four Snake River dams in Washington state would have an especially long-term adverse impact on operations of existing Columbia River pump stations in the lower McNary and John Day pools in Northeast Oregon, as 50 years of sediments will be now deposited in the irrigation intakes downstream. This negative impact is in addition to much more expensive or even nonexistent barging for our products as well as higher energy costs.

Over the last 30 years, the Eastern Oregon irrigation community had a respectful and open dialogue with our past governors (Roberts, Kitzhaber and Kulonowski) and we ask Gov. Brown to commit to the process by listening and understanding our local agricultural concerns as well as all river stakeholders so that she can develop a collaborative approach to protecting salmon without harming the rural economy.

We are committed to a respectful, open minded and solution-oriented dialogue with Gov. Brown and her staff.

*Fred Ziari is an irrigation engineer who for the last 39 years has worked on water management issues in Hermiston and the Pacific Northwest.*

## EDITORIALS

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

## LETTERS

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## SEND LETTERS TO:

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